

Senator Craig Opening Statement
July 20, 2005
Legislative Hearing

Good afternoon. I would like to thank all of you for attending this hearing. First let me welcome our Full Committee Chairman Senator Pete Domenici and the Ranking Member of the Full Committee Senator Jeff Bingaman. I would also like to welcome Senator Ensign who is here to discuss his Las Vegas Motor Speedway land conveyance bill (S. 703). Welcome to Joel Holtrop (hull - trup), Deputy Chief for National Forest Systems from the Forest Service and Larry Benna, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Land Management. Thanks for coming to testify on these bills.

Lastly I would like to welcome our two outside witnesses: Ms. Penny Boston from New Mexico who is here to testify on the Fort Stanton – Snowy River Cave Conservation Act (S. 1170); and Mr. Keith Johnson, the State Controller from my home state of Idaho, who is here today to testify on my bill S. 1131, the Idaho Land Enhancement Act.

We will also be taking testimony on S. 997, the Jefferson County, Montana Land conveyance for a historic cemetery; S. 1238, an amendment by Senators Feinstein, Bingaman and Domenici to the Public Land Corps Act of 1993; and H.R. 1101, a bill to revoke a Public Land Order related to the boundary of the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge.

We anticipate showing a five minute video on the Fort Stanton – Snowy River Cave Conservation Act before we take testimony and after Committee Chairman Domenici and Ranking Minority Bingaman make their opening statements.

Before I ask them to make those statements I want to say something about my bill, S. 1131 – the Idaho Land Enhancement Act. Most people know I don't have a lot of patience for waste or inefficiency in government. When I see officials who are working to reduce waste or make a process more efficient that catches my attention. In this instance I think state and Federal officials are doing just that.

In May of 2001, the residents of Boise decided to tax themselves to fund efforts to secure open space in the Boise Foothills. The Idaho Land Enhancement Act would authorize the exchange of state lands in the Boise Foothills for Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands in Idaho's panhandle. Under this legislation, the people of the Boise area get more open space; and the state and federal agencies involved get a higher level of management efficiency in other parts of the state.

The process has been open, transparent, and has wide support throughout the state. The City of Boise has facilitated public meetings, provided opportunities for public comment, and has made the maps of the exchange available to the public. They've met with all of the affected tribes and counties.

In addition, the multi-agency group completed evaluations of timber values, minerals, cultural resources, water rights, legal access, wildlife, fisheries, vegetation, hydrology, wetlands, threatened and endangered species, and specific habitat. The evaluations show that no major environmental effect will occur as a result of the exchange. In fact, The Nature Conservancy independently reviewed the data and compared it to their eco-regional planning efforts and concluded that the exchange has "limited potential to impact biodiversity values" and they support the exchange.

This exchange is an example of how local, state, and federal partners can come together to collaboratively develop an exchange in which both the public and the land are the ultimate beneficiaries.

As in all my hearings, we will observe the 5 minute rule for both taking testimony and asking questions. The hearing record will remain open for 10 days after the hearing to accept additional testimony.

I will now turn to Senator Domenici and then Senator Bingaman for their opening statements and then any other Member's statements in the order in which each Member arrived.